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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

17 MAR 1978

The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Cy,

I am concerned that continuing our present policy on arms sales to Argentina may not be contributing to our human rights objectives, and about the adverse effects it may be having on our overall long-term interests. Ambassador Castro has stated that the effect of U.S. sanctions policy to date has helped to sensitize Argentine leaders to international concern for human rights, but has not significantly ameliorated specific wrongs. He also points out that the sanctions approach is influencing adversely our other major bilateral objectives -- non-proliferation, good security relationships, and cooperation on multilateral economic and political issues. I think we need to reexamine carefully how we are proceeding.

Although Public Law 95-92 requires a total embargo on security assistance to Argentina after September 30, 1978, our policy over the past year has been an early embargo on all forms of security assistance. I think it is clear that the intent of the Congress in establishing a delayed effective date for termination of security assistance to Argentina was to give the Administration some flexibility in working with the Government of Argentina to encourage significant improvement in human rights practices in that country. I suggest that we now use the remaining maneuvering room made available to us by the statute.

What I propose is that we appeal to the military's interest in maintaining their force capabilities by selectively approving some requests, with a specific appeal to the military leaders that our ability and willingness to approve additional requests will be conditioned entirely by their near term performance in the human rights area. We would also indicate that we hope, if they move meaningfully in the right direction, to take measures to change the embargo legislation. After the initial demarche we would be prepared to complement the State Department by dispatching senior U.S. military men to make our position crystal clear.

In specific terms, I urge that you approve, at a minimum, release of the training which Argentina has requested to purchase, as well as all pending requests for spare parts for U.S. origin equipment. As you know, Ambassador Castro has strongly been urging approval of the training requested.

Classified by _____ The Secretary of Defense
SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION SCHEDULE OF
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Such an initiative should not be difficult to explain to the Congress, especially in light of our restrictive policy over the past year. We would be making use of remaining available time and flexibility granted to us by the Congress and of the most immediate and likely channel of influence on members of the Argentine leadership, the military. We would make a limited contribution to the Administration goal of limiting conventional arms transfers by the provision of spare parts for U.S. origin equipment--thus delaying the need for new acquisitions. Approval of the sale of spare parts and training would have a very minimal impact on the ceiling.

October is soon upon us--I believe we should give this approach a try while the law permits. We have the authority. We have credibility from past actions, and we have plausibility for these actions. Most importantly, we have the possibility for some measure of success.

Harold

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